

Testimony before the Higher Education Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee

HB 5037: An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023

**Submitted by Francis M, Coan, Ph.D., Professor of History, Tunxis Community College
February 22, 2022**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Francis M. Coan. I am a Professor of History at Tunxis Community College, where I have worked for thirty-one years. I am also President of the Tunxis Professional Staff Organization and the elected college representative to the Board of Regents Faculty Advisory Committee.

CSCU managers have requested funding significantly in excess of the amount included in the Governor's proposed budget. I urge you to support this request. While the Governor's budget includes federal relief monies and small increases in state funding, both welcome, it does not go nearly far enough to address the depth and breadth of the immediate and long-term needs of the CSCU system and the students and citizens the system serves.

At the community colleges, our students are disproportionately working class or poor, young, and of color. They and their families suffered, and in many cases are still suffering, the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most come to us academically underprepared for higher education and facing a host of other challenges and obstacles, including poverty, hunger, homelessness, tumultuous family dynamics, the need to work to support themselves and their families, and psychological and emotional problems. While they enter college disadvantaged, they are as deserving of an opportunity to succeed as their socio-economically more fortunate peers who attend the community colleges and four-year public and private institutions.

Attrition and restructuring, coupled with many years of underfunding, have eroded the quality of the education and services our students receive. Three out of four community college instructors are part-time: paid to teach but not to perform the myriad of other duties full-time faculty perform. Full-time faculty, never numerous enough even in the relatively good budget years, are retiring faster than they are being replaced. Every student services office is understaffed and overworked. Our students—and especially our most vulnerable students—pay the price for this false economy.

Education is labor-intensive. Education is expensive. Education requires a large team of skilled, dedicated professionals who devote their time and expertise to helping students. Besides full-time faculty to teach, advise, and mentor them, students need librarians and mental health counselors; Financial Aid, Admissions, Records, and Marketing staff; information technology and educational technology specialists; professional tutors and personnel in writing and

mathematics labs. And these professionals must be available and accessible at every college. Help lines, websites, and managers in distance offices are of little or no value to our students.

There is no way to do education on the cheap. One gets what one pays for. In addition to investing in infrastructure, it is time the state of Connecticut reinvests in its citizens—particularly its poorer citizens—and provides opportunities for all of them to achieve their version of the American dream. For most, a college education is a necessary prerequisite to achieving that dream.

Austerity is not a student retention tool. Funding is. Budget cuts do not promote student success. Funding does. Managers, a necessary evil, do not educate students. Faculty and staff do.

Thank you for your time. I'll be happy to answer any questions you have.